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T H E

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IT is said in the Acts of the Apostles, that historical argument for the presence of the Gentiles in the Christian Church, that, on the occasion of a certain persecution, the disciples scattered, going from Jerusalem everywhere, "*talking the Word.*" The phrase is a very significant one not only from the historical and scientific point of view, but also by reason of its present religious bearings. Historically it contains a hint which throws light upon the life and methods of the primitive believers. They were all missionaries. They carried with them and proclaimed their faith. This proclamation, moreover, was made in a most simple and unconventional way. They did not reason; they did not declaim; they used not finished speech; they just "talked"—one might almost say, "chatted"—the Message, the news concerning Jesus.

SCIENTIFICALLY the phrase is valuable. It discloses one of the elements which lie beneath our present Synoptic Gospels. In their unsystematic character, their differences of arrangement, their variations of narrative and description, their neglect of dates and all that goes to the making of what we would call scientific history—in all these manifest facts may we not discern the results of this Gospel "talking" of the early disciples? Full of the facts in regard to our Lord's public life and ministry, and moved by a supreme religious impulse to tell the Good News and stir the heart, they told what most directly touched them and what they thought would most immediately influence those whom they met. They neither wished nor thought of an orderly presentation

of the facts or of the exact form of words in which, from time time to time, with unpremeditated speech, they expressed themselves. The materials they used, therefore, as well as the form in which they are given us, sprang out of the heart-recollections of these first believers. As they "chatted" over the "Word," these simple-minded, earnest-hearted disciples would most frequently recall and repeat these narratives which contained the essence of the "truth." The staple of their sayings would be such supreme facts as the crucifixion and the resurrection of the Lord. All that revealed His love, the deeds of mercy and words of grace, would be continually on their lips. And this is what we find in these Gospels—the unsystematic "talks" of the primitive believers. Thus, among other factors, this simple one is not the least potent element in the process which gave men these portraits of the Master, so matchless in their simplicity and so weighty in their appeal to the life. Their very differences and confusions are a mark of their original living source and carry us back to the beginning.

BUT have not we of this day a lesson to learn from this phrase? The power that conquered the world in the first three Christian centuries was first felt not in the form of doctrine, strong as the systematic form of the "truth as it is in Jesus" afterwards became in the world. It was the unscientific and unsystematic story of the loving Jesus, Saviour, Friend, Lord, the Christ. It was the story "told," "talked," "chatted," "prattled" by common men as they went from city to city. Can we afford to neglect this means of spreading the truth? Will it not bear emphasizing? Not any less doctrine is needed. Creeds?—if they were abolished to-day, men would make a new and, perhaps, a poorer set of them to-morrow. But the other fact is also true. The cry is raised and wisely raised—*Back to Christ*. Bruce, somewhere in his "Kingdom of God," calls for a company of "Gospellers," who shall go about as these early Christians went about, "talking" the Word, telling, not as from an inspired authoritative Book but out of a revived and,

inspired life, the stories of the Saviour. Is he not right? Shall we not all say, Amen!

LIKEMINDEDNESS with an author is necessary to a full understanding of his meaning. The writers of the Bible were spiritually minded. No one then without this quality deserves recognition as an interpreter of the Scriptures. An unspiritual scholar may render good service as a textual critic and in throwing light upon historical and archæological matters but he cannot penetrate into the full meaning of the Bible. No question then is more important to ask concerning a biblical exegete than, "Is he spiritually minded?" A lack in this respect is fatal to all best results.

Spirituality, however, is not without variety of manifestation. This is seen the moment that we turn to different books of the Bible. There is here a variety as wonderful as the unity. All phases of a life in communion with God are presented. This cannot be denied, for example, to the writers of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes but how different its expression from that exhibited by an Isaiah or Jeremiah. Paul likewise and James were men of intense spirituality but how different their treatment of faith. Such differences of spirituality as are thus manifested in the biblical writers are necessary in their interpreters. The experience, the mental disposition of no single individual is of such compass as to fully meet the requirements for the exposition of the entire Bible. Different minds are necessary correctly to apprehend different portions of the Scriptures. One may utterly fail in finding the true meaning in one place while most successful in divining it in another. It is not sufficient then that an interpreter should be spiritually minded; he should possess that quality of spirituality which will bring him in close touch and sympathy with the writings which he is interpreting. Whether he has this quality, is a question which needs to be asked as well as whether he is spiritual at all.

THE differences and varieties of the spiritual element in the Bible are important not only from the point of view of an interpreter, but also from that of a lover and a believer of its teachings. The immense spiritual reach of that unity of religious thought and life which we call the Book is one fundamental source of its wide influence and permanent power. All men of religious impulse and desire, however aspiring or however lowly these may be, can find help and satisfaction in its varied elements and teachings. A book which contains the Song of Songs and the Lamentations, the Gospel of John and the Proverbs of Solomon or the Wisdom of Koheleth is not likely to appeal to a narrow circle of readers or to be soon antiquated.

A student and friend of this Book ought not to be discouraged or find cause for dissatisfaction with his religious disposition because he observes that one part of the Scripture appeals to him more strongly than another. The Bible appeals to many minds of different sorts and was intended to fulfil the mission of touching all sides of human nature. In its diversified array of attractions every one should have his favorite portion, book or chapter. Every one will find that some parts fail to attract him or to help his life. This is not to be wondered at. They were not meant for him—at least not in his present condition of moral and spiritual life. Another finds his soul satisfied with these elements to the other so unattractive. Thus the Bible reaches all the way round human nature and offers its appropriate light and healing and strength to the individual mind. Every one makes his own Bible out of the Bible, his Holy of Holies, where the soul is silent before the very presence of God.

The absurdities and extravagancies of some interpreters receive their needed rebuke in this important fact. They go upon the assumption that every part of the Scripture must have its teaching for their peculiar bent of mind or must bear its testimony to some special form of doctrine which they have embraced. They cannot endure diversities of operations and varieties of application. Everything must, therefore, be spiritualized. Plain narratives are given a symbolic significance. Out of homely proverbs must be

squeezed the rich juices of evangelical piety. Or, on the other hand, everything must be rationalized. Inspiration must be checked in its highest flights, its wings be plucked off and it be set to drawing the plow of the grammarian or reaping the harvest of the apostle of common sense. How absurd! In this world of truth, the Bible, why force the luxuriant growths of the tropics to spring up in the colder regions of the more temperate zones or demand the fruits of one clime from the trees that flourish in another? Let us be satisfied that every life, however differently circumstanced or originally constituted, may obtain the fullness of its special needs in the abundant and various contents of this greatest storehouse of religious experiences and divine teachings.

Yet there is a very real significance in the fact that this collection of various spiritual elements is one book, the Bible. While it is in a sense a medicine-chest whence one may select the suitable medicament for his weakness or woe—or better, the seat of food-supply to which each soul may resort for the particular nutriment appropriate and satisfying—it must never be forgotten that this Scripture is not a collection but an organism. All portions of it are useful in the development of every individual character. No man can attain unto the fullness of life for which he was created unless there enter into his being all these various biblical elements. All Scripture is profitable for every one. The ideal of the one who finds religious life in the Bible should be to obtain the fully-developed, well-rounded biblical life. Proverbs is needed for him as well as the Psalms; Job, but also James and John. These may appear in due proportions according to the bent of the disposition, but each should be sought after. Each will correct some fault, some defect or deformity; each will supply some lack, some needful element of strength. Too many men are satisfied with living on a part of the Word. There should be more who aspire toward and strive after the whole of the Bible as the norm of personal character.